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Tuklas Sining, by Fernandez, et al.

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What about the photographs? This is the saving grace of the book. Most are well-taken and the publication of archival photos adds value to the otherwise flawed book. But perhaps this is what the book was, after all. A collection of photographs, never meant to be read through by a reviewer, but to be perused on some leisurely Sunday afternoon just as one peruses the Sunday magazines, only occasionally, turning to the text. And maybe, the eye satisfied, interest aroused, the reader might learn a thing or two about a precious Filipino heritage.

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TUKLAS SINING. Doreen G. Fernandez, *Panitikan: An Essay on Philippine Art*; Alice C. Guillermo, *Sining Biswal: An Essay on Philippine Visual Arts*; Antonio C. Hila, *Musika: An Essay on Philippine Music*; Bienvenido L. Lumbea, *Pelikula: An Essay on Philippine Film*; Rodrigo D. Perez, III, *Arkitektura: An Essay on Philippine Architecture*; Nicanor G. Tiongson, *Dulaan: An Essay on Philippine Theater*; Basilio Esteban S. Villaruz, *Sayaw: An Essay on Philippine Dance*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1989.

Tuklas Sining, to quote the foreword to each of the seven monographs, "is a series of essays and video documentaries on the seven arts in the Philippines published by the Cultural Center of the Philippines. The monographs trace the evolution of the arts in the context of Philippine society and history and help create a Filipino national consciousness and identity. Furthermore, they illustrate how art and culture are essential to the task of nation building."

Beginning with its revamp in 1986, the Cultural Center of the Philippines has taken a more nationalist orientation in its programs and research. *Tuklas Sining* is an innovative fruit of the Center's orientation. *Tuklas Sining*, especially the video documentary part, is long overdue. How can we expect to raise a national consciousness, if we don't know what to crow about? Now, here in the modern idiom of video, we are regaled with the Filipinos' cultural heritage in the seven arts: music, literature, drama, architecture, painting, dance, and the most modern of all, cinema. For the specialist, nothing in the video documentary nor in the accompanying monographs is new, but one must be blasé not to respond to the impact of seeing all seven tapes, perhaps, not all at once, but one at a time. There's a lot that the Filipino can be proud of.

The video and monographs are oriented to a wide viewership and readership, "without sacrificing the authority of information." The specialist might quarrel about some point of erudition or interpretation [I still say Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *pasyon* was published in 1703, not 1704]. The series focuses on trends rather than artists; this is clearly evident in the sequence on contemporary visual art. One may quarrel that trends are the creation of critics and historians because art is essentially individual and art expressions unique. And thus one may propose a different way of organizing material. One may

raise similar recondite objections, but for the primer that it is and for its intended audience, the series succeeds well.

The video and monographs are, of course, uneven. Some arts have more to say or show than the rest. This has nothing to do with the competence of the monographs' writers, but with the state of research on each of the arts [a quick glance at the bibliography appended to each text should bear that out], or with the relative youth of the art form. Cinema is a twentieth century Philippine phenomenon, but dance, music and literature have been with us since ancient times.

The videos sometimes use similar footage. But that might not be immediately apparent if one watches a segment at a time (about forty minutes each) Could this be because of lack of material, some oversight in research, or because of the impossibility of cutting up performance arts into song, dance and drama?

The patently nationalist agenda of the series is found in every work. All follow a framework that is broadly historical, beginning with the precolonial period, through the different colonizations, to the contemporary era. To begin with the precolonial is to take a position vis-a-vis Philippine cultural expression. We already had a sense of self before Western intrusion, the series implies. But the pre-colonial shapes of some art forms are difficult to document, and this is especially true of the performance arts—drama, dance, and music—where the artifact itself disappears as soon as it is created. When a movement is made it is gone; when a note is sung it fades. To fill in the gap, the essays document indigenous expressions. "Indigenous drama," "Indigenous dances," "Indigenous music," "Early shelters and houses"—these are subsection titles culled from the different essays.

It is assumed that ethnic groups that have not been subjected to extensive and intensive cultural domination by Western powers do reflect the shape of precolonial culture. This is a valid anthropological move, but must be used with caution, for no aspect of Philippine culture has not been touched by colonialism, even but faintly. A lack of caution is found, for instance, in the essay on the visual arts. After the essay discusses pottery, in particular, the Manunggul jar, the essay (and video) juxtaposes a discussion on weaving, calling it "one of our most precious living traditions." While the technology of the backstrap loom is certainly ancient, archaeological evidence demonstrates that the product of ancient looms were far simpler than what has appeared in recent times. The range of color choices was limited to the earth colors, grays and blacks, and materials were rougher, like bark and abaca. Trade contact and colonialism introduced silks, cotton and other weaving materials. Placing weaving then under the precolonial period can be misleading.

All also follow an art-in-society framework. Not content with mere formal analysis, the works show how the art form interacted and continues to interact with society. To quote some authors. Guillermo: "Philippine art can thus realize its full vitality by becoming a national force for change toward a truly democratic and human order." Perez: "Architecture for the poor will help answer the long urgent need to redesign and transform the social order." Villaruz's dance "has and always will be a dynamic and living way of defining, affirming, and empowering the Filipino and his identity," etc.

All the authors have recognized the historical role and social responsibility of the arts. They are for art that builds Philippine society. And the intended audience of this series can do best to foster this aim by acquiring the series. It might be financially too steep for an individual, but certainly schools and other like institutions should acquire the set. The set costs more than ₱2,000: seven tapes and seven monographs in all. I hope that CCP is planning a Filipino version of the series, and planning to air this on national television so that it can reach a wider audience, not just students and the culturati, but the Filipinos to whom these artistic expressions belong.

Enough now of all that breast beating, "We have no culture!" "We're a damaged culture!" Here's a lot to be mighty proud of.

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SUBLI: ISANG SAYAW SA APAT NA TINIG (ONE DANCE IN FOUR VOICES). By Elena Rivera Mirano et al. Manila: Museo ng Kalinangang Pilipino, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1989. 107 pp. illus.

How does one capture in choreological symbols what movement is? How does one freeze in pictures what is live? How does one put into words what is ineffable? That is what *Subli* strives to do.

For most Filipinos familiar with the Bayanihan's fancy footwork, subli is the hat dance from Batangas. Mirano's book demonstrates that to think of Subli that way is to mistake chaff for grain. True, subli dancers wear hats. True enough, the menfolk wear bright red *kundiman* pants, and the women folk *saya* and *pañuelo*, appropriate costumes for folk dance. True, they weave in and out in energetic patterns to the syncopation of drums, reminiscent of tribal percussion music. But, what for all these movements? All these exertions?

Mirano tells us that for a true subli to take place at least eight hours is needed, not the quarter of an hour or so in a suite of lowland dances. Subli is not *divertissement*, or better still, subli is *divertissement* of the highest order — a religious dance that leads to ecstasy. Subli is performed in honor of the Holy Cross, *Ang Mahal na Poong Santa Cruz*, a religious symbol of dark hardwood, identified as *anubing* or *balayong*, venerated in the Batangas towns of Bauan, Alitagtag, San Pascual, Mabini, San Jose, Cuenca and in the barrio of Pook in Agoncillo. Easily the most famous is that of Bauan, now encased in a beaten silver reliquary, which the devotees call *Tahanan ng Poon*.

Subli is performed, the first of our voices (the performer's) tells us, as an act of thanksgiving, propitiation, petition or sheer worship. It leads to "gaan," an incredible lightness of being better experienced being difficult to put into words. The participants describe this experience, which in mystical writings is sometimes called consolation, as a state in which one's consciousness is so